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RUEHHM/AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY 2432

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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: CG VISITS DETAINED UBCV PATRIARCH THICH HUYEN QUANG

REF: A) 06 HCMC 1115; B) 06 HCMC 551 AND PREVIOUS

1. (SBU) The Consul General paid a 30-minute courtesy call on UBCV Patriarch Thich Huyen Quang at his Monastery in Binh Dinh province on March 14. Thich Huyen Quang acknowledged that his health was failing, but, with a sense of humor noted that he was over 90 after all. He said that he has been able to receive medical attention in Binh Dinh since his return from HCMC in late 2006. (Per ref A, the UBCV patriarch was sent to HCMC for medical treatment in October 2006. UBCV officials from HCMC as well as other dissidents used the opportunity to visit the Patriarch and to meet each other by Thich Huyen Quang's bedside.)

2. (SBU) Thich Huyen Quang has not been able to receive fellow UBCV monks in Binh Dinh since his return from HCMC. The Patriarch said that authorities continue to confine him to the monastery. Thich Huyen Quang said that most of his days are occupied translating Buddhist sacred texts into Vietnamese.

3. (SBU) The UBCV Patriarch complained that President Bush had not raised human rights in his meetings with GVN officials in Hanoi during his November 2006 visit to Vietnam. The Consul General replied that, although this issue was not raised in public, the President, the Secretary and other USG officials pressed the GVN to improve its respect for human rights. Thich Huyen Quang recounted GVN efforts in 2003 to convince him to join the GVN-recognized Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, but emphasized that he told then-Prime Minister Phan Van Khai that he "would not rest until the UBCV was back." This continues to be his position.

4. (SBU) Asked to comment on the return of Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh to Vietnam, the Patriarch offered no comment on Thich Nhat Hanh's effort to hold a series of "reconciliation prayer meetings" in Hanoi, Hue and HCMC (ref A). However, he said that he would welcome the opportunity to receive Thich Nhat Hanh were he to visit him. (Note: In 2005, negotiations to arrange a meeting between Thich Huyen Quang and Thich Nhat Hanh collapsed, leaving both sides bitter about the outcome. End Note.)

5. (SBU) Comment: Unlike our last meeting in May 2006 (ref B), Thich Huyen Quang's health and mental acuity were noticeably weaker. The monk repeated himself at times and his mind strayed. Thich Huyen Quang's assistant explained that it has been getting more difficult for the Monk to remember facts and keep his thoughts straight. Provincial officials did not hinder or complain about our visit to the UBCV Patriarch. HCMC-based UBCV General Secretary Thich Quang Do is in line to inherit the leadership of the UBCV. End Comment.

WINNICK